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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LILONGWE 000415

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KHIV](#) [PINR](#) [TW](#) [CM](#) [MI](#)

SUBJECT: TAIWAN FRETS OVER POST-ELECTION TIES TO MALAWI

REF: A. 02 LILONGWE 1031

[B](#). LILONGWE 286

[C](#). STATE 48160

[D](#). STATE 55006

Classified By: Pol/Econoff Marc Dillard for reasons 1.5 b/d.

Summary

1. (C/NF) Taiwanese diplomats are worried that an opposition win in Malawi's upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections could result in Malawi breaking diplomatic relations, Second Secretary C.W. "Albert" Chang told Pol/Econoff. Local Taiwanese officials avoid the opposition and channel some aid through mechanisms closely aligned with the ruling United Democratic Front (UDF), leaving many in opposition to perceive the Taiwanese as pro-UDF rather than as development partners with the country of Malawi. Noting some recent PRC activity in Malawi, Chang made a pitch for closer local aid cooperation with the USG, so that the GOM might perceive cutting ties with Taiwan as threatening USG programs as well. While we agree that the Taiwanese are seen as pro-UDF, we note that Taiwan managed a similar transition ten years ago, when it dropped its support of the dictator Hastings Banda and aligned with current President Muluzi. The key to that transition (as will likely be the case again) was the cash Taiwan produced for the new government. End summary.

Taiwan Fears Change After Malawi's Election

2. (C/NF) Diplomats at the Taiwanese Embassy in Malawi are worried that a change in Malawi's government after May 20 presidential and parliamentary elections could affect Malawi's diplomatic recognition of Taiwan, Second Secretary C.W. "Albert" Chang told Pol/Econoff on May 5. The polls, which will be Malawi's third democratic elections, will bring with them a new president, as President Muluzi is constitutionally ineligible to run for a third term.

3. (C/NF) Chang had asked for the meeting ostensibly to discuss election prospects, because, he explained, Taiwanese diplomats have virtually no contact with opposition parties. He stated that their practice of avoiding the opposition was not a policy, but described it as "well understood" that officials should not meet with those outside the government. President Muluzi, he added, "has pawns everywhere," including National Intelligence Bureau officers and other "watchers." "He would know if Taiwan met with the opposition, and he might cut ties." (Note: Chang later stated that the Taiwanese Ambassador had frozen out a confidante, former Agriculture Minister Aleke Banda, when Banda defected from the ruling United Democratic Front.)

4. (C/NF) Because of Taiwan's contact practices, Chang told Pol/Econoff that many in the opposition associate Taiwan with the ruling United Democratic Front (UDF) and would be inclined to court the PRC. (Note: Taiwan's aid practices, which have included facilitating a Taiwanese NGO's support for a trust run by the first lady, as well as behind-the-scenes payments per ref A, re-inforce opposition perceptions of Taiwan supporting the UDF rather than Malawi.)

Suspicious of PRC Activity in Malawi

5. (C/NF) Unsurprisingly, Chang stated that the Taiwanese keep a close watch on suspected PRC activity in Malawi. Over the course of the conversation, he noted the following:

--A PRC company in the commercial capital Blantyre is constructing an office building on contract for the GOM. Chang stated that the Taiwanese Embassy suspects that undercover PRC officials have been placed among the company's management. He stated that the Taiwanese had uncovered a similar arrangement with a PRC Foreign Affairs implant in a company "in Nigeria or somewhere else in the West African region" two years ago.

--Current Minister of Housing K. Phumisa attended a conference in Beijing between one and two years ago (likely in previous incarnations as Minister of Information or Minister of Transportation). How, Chang asked rhetorically, did he get invited?

--A PRC television crew recently visited Malawi and toured the country extensively while making a documentary. Chang stated that local PRC representation would have been needed to set up such a tour.

16. (C/NF) In possible connection to ref D request, Chang gently probed whether the USG had taken stock of PRC activities in Malawi and asked whether the USG had considered how changes in African recognition of Taiwan could affect Taiwan-PRC and US-Taiwan relations.

Pitch for Closer Local US-Taiwan Cooperation

17. (C/NF) Chang closed the meeting with a pitch for linking local USG and Taiwanese aid programs. Such a link, he explained, would benefit Taiwan "strategically," because the GOM would see severing ties with Taiwan as potentially threatening to USG programs as well.

Comment

18. (C/NF) We wonder if Chang's reasoning for USG-Taiwanese aid cooperation is partly behind Taiwan's recent fervent attempts to link its local HIV/AIDS programs with CDC efforts (refs B and C). As for Taiwanese fears about its official ties with Malawi, Taiwan managed a similar transition ten years ago from the thirty-year dictatorship of Hastings Banda to President Muluzi's UDF. Malawi has a long history of selling diplomatic recognition to those willing to pay, and a successful transition would probably only be a matter of arranging for a large enough suitcase of cash.

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